

## Message Text

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ACTION OES-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00  
INRE-00 ERDA-05 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00  
DODE-00 EB-08 FEAE-00 FPC-01 H-01 INR-07 INT-05  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-04 SP-02 SS-15  
STR-04 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 AGR-05 CEQ-01 CG-00  
DLOS-09 DOTE-00 EPA-01 FMC-01 IO-13 JUSE-00  
NSF-01 PA-01 PRS-01 /126 W

-----251714Z 110748 /46

O R 251558Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY OSLO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3626

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

USOECD PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 1975

FRANKFURT FOR GAO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ENRG, SENV, NO

SUBJECT: UNCONTROLLED LEAK AT NORWAY'S EKOFISK FIELD

REF: OSLO 1526

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. AS A RESULT OF AN ACCIDENT DURING MAINTENANCE OPERATIONS, OIL  
BEGAN LEAKING ON FRIDAY NIGHT (APRIL 22) AT A RATE OF 4,000 TONS  
OF OIL AND GAS A DAY FROM A RISER PIPE AT NORWAY'S EKOFISK FIELD.

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APPARENTLY, DURING EFFORTS TO RETRIEVE MEASURING EQUIPMENT WHICH  
HAD FALLEN DOWN THE PIPE, THE CHRISTMAS TREE AT THE WELL HEAD  
WAS REMOVED AND THE LEAK BEGAN WHEN DRILLING MUD FAILED TO CONTAIN  
PRESSURE AND A SECURITY VALVE BELOW THE DEABED FAILED TO FUNCTION.  
ALL WORKERS HAVE NOW BEEN SAFETY EVACUATED FROM THE EKOFISK COMPLEX,  
THE COMPLEX HAS BEEN SHUT DOWN, AND AN OIL SLICK 40 KILOMETERS  
LONG AND 2 TO 3 KILOMETERS WIDE HAS SPREAD OUT AROUND THE FIELD.

2. PHILLIPS PETROLEUM, WHICH IS THE EKOFISK OPERATOR, HAS CALLED IN EXPERTS TO STOP THE LEAK, INCLUDING THE US RED AIDAIR TEAM, WHICH HAS ALREADY BEGUN PREPARATIONS TO TRY TO CAP THE RISER PIPE WITH THE SECURITY VALVE WHICH WAS PARTLY INSTALLED WHEN THE LEAKAGE BEGAN. PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS ARE REPORTED TO BE GOOD. REPORTEDLY AN ATTEMPT WILL BE MADE SOON DURING QUIET WEATHER BEFORE AN EXPECTED STORM. IF A HOLE MUST BE DRILLED TO STOP THE FLOW, IT IS UNDERSTOOD IT MAY TAKE AS LONG AS 70 TO 80 DAYS, SINCE THE PETROLEUM RESERVOIR IS LOCATED 10,000 FEET BELOW THE SEABED IN HARD ROCK.

3. BEFORE IT SHUT DOWN, EKOFISK WAS PRODUCING 300,000 BARRELS OF OIL A DAY WORTH APPROXIMATELY 3.8 MILLION DOLLARS, INCLUDING NORWAYS 10 PERCENT ROYALTY. THE NORWEGIAN PRESS SAYS THAT PHILLIPS, WHICH OWNS 40 PERCENT OF THE EKOFISK FIELD, AND ITS PARTNER COMPANIES WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE OIL SPILL CLEANUP AND ANY DAMAGE.

4. OIL SPILL CLEANUP EQUIPMENT IS BEING RUSHED TO THE EKOFISK SITE, AND CLEANUP EFFORTS STARTED APRIL 25. ALL NORTH SEA COUNTRIES HAVE OFFERED ASSISTANCE. THERE IS SAID TO BE CONSIDERABLE RISK OF FIRE, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE OF THE HIGH GAS CONTENT OF THE OIL. THE SLICK IS DAID TO COVER ONE OF THE RICHER FISHING AREAS IN THE NORTH SEA, AND OCEANOGRAPHERS HAVE WARNED AGAINST USING CHEMICALS BECAUSE OF POSSIBLE DAMAGE TO FISH RESOURCES. SOME EXPERTS BELIEVE A LARGE PART OF THE OIL WILL EVAPORATE AFTER A FEW DAYS. METEOROLOGISTS BELIEVE THE SLICK WILL STAY IN THE EKOFISK AREA, ALTHOUGH INITIAL REPORTS INDICATED  
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FIRST THAT IT WAS DRIFTING TOWARD THE NORWEGIAN COAST AND LATER THAT IT WAS HEADED TOWARDS SCOTLAND. NORWAY'S CABINET MET TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE DURING MUCH OF APRIL 25. NORWAY'S MINISTERS OF INDUSTRY AND ENVIRONMENT WILL BRIEF PARLIAMENT'S INDUSTRY COMMITTEE APRIL 25 AND THE FULL PARLIAMENT APRIL 26.  
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5. COMMENT: NEWS IN NORWAY OF THE OIL LEAK, WHERE THERE IS EXTRAORDINARY SENSITIVITY TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND OFFSHORE ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE, HIT LIKE A BOMB SHELL. WHILE IT IS TOO EARLY TO PINPOINT THE CONCRETE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES IN NORWAY OF THE SPILL, IT IS CERTAIN THAT IN A COUNTRY WHERE OIL POLICY IS ONE OF THE KEY POLITICAL ISSUES AND IN AN ELECTION YEAR AND WHERE NO OTHER SUBSTANTIVE CONTENTIOUS ISSUES HAVE YET EMERGED THAT THE PRESENT SPILL WILL HAVE SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES. IT WILL ALSO CONTINUE TO MAKE OIL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT, HWERE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT IS A KEY ISSUE,

EVEN MORE DELICATE AND POLITICALLY SENSITIVE.

6. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY NOW THE GOVERNMENT WILL FALL BECAUSE OF THE MISHAP UNLESS DIRECT GOVERNMENT CULPABILITY IS FOUND, AS IN THE 1962 KINGS BAY MINE ACCIDENT ON SVALBARD WHEN THE GOVERNMENT FELL BECAUSE OF IMPROPER SAFETY ENFORCEMENT. THE SMALL NON-SOCIALIST LIBERAL PARTY, WHICH WAS HOLDING ITS NATIONAL CONVENTION OVER THE WEEKEND, DID DEMAND THAT THE GOVERNMENT RESIGN BECAUSE OF THE INCIDENT, BUT MOST POLITICIANS ARE AWARE THAT ALL PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT, WHERE MAJOR OIL POLICY DECISIONS ARE MADE, BEAR A RESPONSIBILITY FOR OFFSHORE DRILLING DECISIONS. IN ADDITION, THE MAJOR NON-SOCIALIST PARTIES PROBABLY SEE LITTLE ADVANTAGE IN TAKING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO GOVERN BEFORE THE SEPTEMBER ELECTION, ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD CLEARLY HOPE TO BENEFIT FROM THE ACCIDENT IN THE ELCTION. CERTAINLY THE SPEED WITH WHICH THE SPILL IS CLEANED UP AND THE AMOUNT OF DAMAGE IT CAUSES WILL BE A FACTOR IN THE ULTIMATE POLITICAL

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AFFECT OF THE INCIDENT.

7. INITIAL COMMENTS FROM PARTY LEADERS REFLECT A DESIRE ON THE PART OF THE LABOR AND NON-SOCIALIST CONSERVATIVE PARTIES, WHICH TEND TO FAVOR A RELATIVELY EXPANSIONARY OIL POLICY, TO EXERCISE CAUTION IN DRAWING CONCLUSIONS FROM THE INCIDENT. THE OTHER TWO MAIN PARTIES, THE NON-SOCIALIST CENTER AND CHRISTIAN PEOPLES PARTIES, WHICH FAVOR A SLOWER APPROACH TO OIL DEVELOPMENT, HAVE INDICATED AN "I TOLD YOU SO" ATTITUDE ON THE HAZARDS OF OIL EXPLOITATION AND HAVE INDICATED A NEED TO IMPROVE PREVENTION AND CLEANUP MEASURES BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH FURTHER OIL DRILLING. FISHING AND ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS HAVE EXPRESSED SIMILAR VIEWS OVER THE WEEKEND. ONLY THE LIBERAL PARTY AND COMMUNISTS TO DATE HAVE CALLED FOR A GOVERNMENT CHARGE.

8. NONETHELESS ONE IMMEDIATE EFFECT WILL BE A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION OF THE REASON FOR THE ACCIDENT. PRIME MINISTER NORDLI HAS INDICATED HE WANTS SUCH AN INVESTIGATION, AND OTHER PARTY LEADERS HAVE STATED THE SAME. THE QUESTIONS WOULD SEEM TO BE OVER WHETHER THE INVESTIGATION WILL BE CONDUCTED BY PARLIAMENT, THE INDUSTRY MINISTRY, OR EVEN A SPECIAL COMMISSION.

9. INITIAL DRILLING NORTH OF 62 DEGREES IN 1978 MAY WELL BE A MAJOR CASUALTY OF THE ACCIDENT; A DELAY IN THE DRILLING TIME-TABLE WOULD NOW SEEM VERY LIKELY. IN MARCH A FINAL DECISION TO BEGIN DRILLING NORTH OF 62 DEGREES WAS PUT OFF UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS FOR POLITICAL REASONS AND PENDING APPROVAL OF A REPORT OF SAFETY AND POLLUTION MEASURES FOR PROTECTION OF THE AREA (OSLO 1526). THIS REPORT IS EXPECTED TO BE DELAYED UNTIL A THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF THE ACCIDENT IS CONSIDERED AND CAN BE FACTORED INTO IT.

10. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO DETERMINE THE EFFECT OF THE ACCIDENT  
ON OTHER ASPECTS OF NORWEGIAN OIL POLICY, BUT GOVERNMENT PLANS  
TO ISSUE NEW CONCESSIONS IN ORDER TO BRING NORTH SEA PRODUCTION  
UP TO THE 90 MILLION TON A YEAR "MODERATE RATE" OF PRODUCTION  
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APPROVED IN 1974 WILL PROBABLY BE DEFERRED. RENEWED CALLS FOR  
SEPARATION OF THE INSPECTION AND REGULATORY FUNCTION, BOTH OF  
WHICH ARE NOW PERFORMED BY THE OIL DIRECTORATE, ARE ALSO  
LIKELY.  
END CONFIDENTIAL.  
ANDERS

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Copy:** SINGLE  
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**Decaption Note:**  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**TAGS:** ENRG, SENV, NO  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
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22 May 2009  
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